

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final Report: Wyoming Child and Family Services Review

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) assesses State performance during a specified time period with respect to seven child welfare outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being and with respect to seven systemic factors. The Wyoming CFSR was conducted the week of July 8, 2002. The assessment is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Wyoming Department of Family Services (DFS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases from three counties in the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three counties and the State capital) with a wide range of stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, various levels of State and local DFS personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, service providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

The Department of Family Services social service system, which serves Wyoming’s children and youth populations, is currently divided into two divisions, the Division of Protective Services and the Division of Juvenile Services. Both of these populations were included in the review of the 50 case sample in the Child and Family Services Review. A number of the findings discussed in the final report reflect the fact that child safety and well-being standards equally apply to both populations.

A key CFSR finding was that the State data for 2000 met the national standards with respect to the following outcome measures:

- The incidence of maltreatment of children in foster care,
- The rate of foster care re-entries within 12 months of discharge from a previous foster care episode,
- The rate of reunifications occurring within 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care,
- The percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placement settings during their first 12 months in foster care.

The case reviews and stakeholder interviews also indicate that the State is effective in preventing foster care re-entries (item 5) and placing children in close proximity to their biological families (item 11).

Despite these strengths, the State did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. CFSR findings suggest that DFS is not consistent in its efforts to maintain children safely in their homes and reduce the risk of harm to children (safety outcome 2). The case reviews and stakeholder interviews suggested a number of issues that contributed to the State’s performance on the safety outcomes.

A significant concern identified through the case reviews and stakeholder interviews was that in many cases DFS tends to conduct safety and risk assessments that focus only on the target child rather than conducting a comprehensive assessment of the family,

including the potential risk of harm to other children in the family. Additionally, stakeholders and case reviewers expressed concern about the number of child maltreatment reports that are screened out of the child protective services system. Another safety-related issue was the fact that the agency does not always conduct an investigation of child maltreatment reports involving children in open child protective services cases. Frequently, these reports are passed on to the existing caseworker and supervisor. Stakeholders did not believe that these new reports were appropriately evaluated regarding on-going or increasing risk to the children in the case. Overall, case reviewers indicated that DFS was more effective in addressing safety and risk of harm issues when caseworkers implemented a family-centered approach that included assessments of the multiple dynamics that are related to family functioning.

Achieving permanency in a timely manner for children in foster care (permanency outcome 1) also was found to be an area needing improvement. Although data reported in the State Data Profile indicate that the State met the national standards for reunifications within 12 months and placement stability, case review findings did not support these findings. Also, the State did not meet the national standard for adoptions within 24 months. Overall, permanency outcome 1 was found to be substantially achieved in only 71 percent of the applicable cases.

On-site interviews found that stakeholders were generally positive in their descriptions of DFS' efforts to establish appropriate permanency goals for children and to meet the timeframes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) with regard to seeking TPR. However, stakeholders also noted that there often are court-related problems with regard to establishing permanency in a timely manner, including crowded court dockets and/or judges who are not knowledgeable about child welfare cases. Other stakeholders reported that in some areas of the State, there is a general reluctance to pursue TPR at the agency, District Attorney, and court levels unless there is already an adoptive family identified for the child.

Another identified concern pertained to the State's effectiveness in ensuring that families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs (well-being outcome 1). The case reviews found that for many families, the state was not effective in addressing the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents (item 17). While the state sometimes addresses the needs of the target child, the state does not always assess or address the needs of other children living in the home or of both parents' needs. This is a key concern identified by the CFSR. In addition, children and fathers were not consistently involved in case planning (item 18), and caseworker visits with parents and children (items 19 and 20) often were not of sufficient frequency or quality to ensure children's safety and well-being or promote attainment of case goals.

A key problem identified with respect to this outcome was a lack of family focus in service delivery. Case reviews found that services tended to focus on the target child rather than addressing the needs of the entire family. Other problems related to this outcome identified in the case review process were: (1) an inconsistency in the quality of assessments of children and parents with regard to service needs, and (2) in some cases, a failure to provide services to address identified needs.

CFSR findings also indicate that DFS is inconsistent in its efforts to address children's physical and mental health needs (well-being outcome 3). In 28 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS did not adequately address children's physical health needs (item 22) and in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS did not adequately address children's mental health needs (item 23). One concern identified was that some children in the cases reviewed exhibited behavioral problems ||that indicated a need for a mental health assessment, but no mental health assessment was ever conducted. In addition, stakeholders interviewed as part of the CFSR expressed concern about the general scarcity of mental health services for children in the State.

With regard to the State's performance on the systemic factors, the CFSR determined that the State was in substantial conformity with factors related to the statewide information system; quality assurance; agency responsiveness to the community; and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention. However, the State was not in substantial conformity with factors pertaining to the case review system, training, or service array.

The following key concerns were identified with respect to the various systemic factors:

- DFS is not consistently involving parents as partners in the process of developing the case plan.
- The 12-month permanency hearings are not being consistently held in a timely manner across the State.
- DFS is not filing for TPR (for children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months) in a consistent manner across the State.
- The State does not have an effective, comprehensive, staff development and training program or ongoing training requirements for staff.
- The availability of services varies considerably across the State.
- The State lacks a statewide process to ensure aggressive recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State.

The following is a summary of the CFSR findings regarding specific outcomes and systemic factors.

KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Status of Safety Outcome S1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 88.2 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicated that the State did not meet the national standard for the rate of maltreatment recurrence.

Although the State did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome, there was evidence in many cases that DFS was effective in responding to child maltreatment reports in a timely manner and preventing maltreatment recurrence. However, these efforts were not consistent across cases. In addition, stakeholders and case reviewers expressed concern about the number of child maltreatment reports that are screened out of the child protective services system and the fact that the agency does not always conduct an investigation of child maltreatment reports involving children in open child protective services cases.

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that the agency had initiated investigations of reports of child maltreatment in a timely manner in 84 percent of the 19 applicable cases. However, in 16 percent of applicable cases, DHS did not respond to reports of child maltreatment in accordance with established timeframes.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although there was no recurrence of maltreatment in 94 percent of the 31 applicable cases, data from the State Data Profile indicate that State's incidence of repeat maltreatment for 2000 was 6.29 percent, which does not quite meet the national standard of 6.1 percent. Because the two indicators are assessed using different measures, it is necessary for both measures to meet the standards or specified criteria for an overall rating of Strength to be assigned to the item.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Status of Safety Outcome S2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 69.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

A general CFSR finding was that DFS is not consistent in its efforts to maintain children safely in their homes and reduce the risk of harm to children. One concern identified through the case reviews and stakeholder interviews was that in many cases DFS tends to conduct safety and risk assessments that focus only on the target child rather than conducting a comprehensive assessment of the

family, including the potential risk of harm to other children in the family. Case reviewers indicated that DFS was more effective in addressing the safety and risk of harm issues when a family-centered approach was implemented.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to maintain children safely in their homes. However, in 18 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to provide services to ensure children's safety while preventing their placement in foster care. According to the Statewide Assessment, reasonable efforts are required to prevent placement, unless safety issues make it inappropriate to prevent removal.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made sufficient efforts to reduce the risk of harm to children. However, in 28 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS was not consistently effective in its efforts to reduce risk of harm to children.

II. PERMANENCY

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Status of Permanency Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 71 percent of cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.

Although Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity for this outcome, several areas of strength were identified through the CFSR. The State Data Profile indicates that State data for fiscal year (FY) 2000 meets the national standards established for the rates of (1) foster care re-entries, (2) reunifications within 12 months of a child's entry into foster care, and (3) placement stability during the first 12 months in foster care. In addition, case reviews revealed a low incidence of re-entry into foster care for the cases under review. However, the case reviews did result in the items pertaining to timeliness of reunifications and placement stability being rated as Areas Needing Improvement. The State did not meet the national standard established for finalized adoptions within 24 months of a child's entry into foster care.

With regard to permanency, a key concern raised through the case reviews was that only two of the 31 children in the foster care cases had a goal of adoption, while seven children had a goal of long-term foster care. Although this may be due in part to the large

percentage of cases that involve adolescents who entered care due to CHINS petitions or juvenile delinquency, case reviewers and stakeholders expressed concern about the willingness of DFS to pursue adoption as a goal for children and to file for termination of parental rights (TPR) to facilitate this process. Although some stakeholders stated that there have been improvements and that processes are in place to ensure timely filing of TPRs, others reported that (1) TPR filings are not always timely due to reluctance to pursue TPR until there is an adoptive family available, (2) there is a lack of adoptive families, and (3) families providing therapeutic foster care who wish to adopt may not adopt because they face reduced provision of Medicaid coverage.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- The State's incidence of foster care re-entry (8.0 percent) reported in the State Data Profile meets the national standard of 8.6 percent.
- In 86 percent of the applicable cases, children did not re-enter foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of applicable cases reviewers determined that children had placement stability and/or that placement changes were in the child's best interest. However, concerns were identified with regard to placement stability in 16 percent of the cases. The State Data Profile indicates that 87.4 percent of all children in foster care for 12 months or less had no more than two placement settings, which meets the national standard of 86.9 percent. Because the two indicators are assessed using different measures, it is necessary for both measures to meet standards or acceptable criteria in order for this item to be rated as a Strength.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of foster care cases, reviewers determined that the Department of Family Services had established appropriate permanency goals for children in a timely manner. However, concerns were identified regarding this issue in 16 percent of foster care cases. A key concern raised by case reviewers and stakeholders pertained to the reluctance on the part of DFS and the courts to seek TPR unless an adoptive family had already been identified for the child.

Another key CFSR finding was that in only a few cases was termination of parental rights being filed on behalf of children who have been in care for 15 of 22 months. This means that children may remain in foster care until they age out of care, without a chance for adoption, even in those cases where no compelling reason existed that would support a decision not to seek TPR.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship or Permanent Placement with Relatives

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives. However, in 18 percent of applicable cases reviewers determined that DFS had not made concerted efforts to achieve these permanency goals in a timely manner. Although the State Data Profile for fiscal year 2000 indicates that the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (81.6%) meets the national standard of 76.2 percent, it is necessary for both that measure and this indicator to meet standards or acceptable criteria in order for this item to be rated as a Strength.

Item 9. Adoption

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Data provided for the State Data Profile indicates that the State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of finalized adoptions occurring within 24 months of the child's removal from home. Also, on-site reviewers determined that DFS had not made diligent efforts to achieve the completion of adoption in a timely manner in one of the two applicable cases.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had assisted children in attaining the goal of other planned living arrangements. However, in 43 percent of the cases, reviewers identified concerns with respect to this item.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Status of Permanency Outcome 2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 77.4 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Although the State did not achieve substantial conformity with the outcome pertaining to maintaining continuity of family relationships and connections, CFSR findings indicate that DFS is effective in placing children in foster care in close proximity to their homes and communities unless they have special treatment needs. In addition, DFS attempts to place siblings together, but lacks sufficient placement resources that will accept sibling groups. A key concern identified through the case reviews pertained to an inconsistency on the part of the agency with regard to efforts to seek relatives as placement resources and promote visitation of children in foster care with parents and siblings. Another concern relates to the case review finding that although the agency routinely

notifies Tribes when a Native American child with a known tribal affiliation is placed in care, the question of a child's possible Native American background was not routinely explored at entry into foster care.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 97 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that children were placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives, or placement in another community was justified based on the child's needs.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 83 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that siblings were either placed together or there was a justifiable reason for their separation. However, in 17 percent of the cases, siblings were not placed together and their separation was not deemed necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 74 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had made, or was making, concerted efforts to facilitate visitation. However, in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had not made concerted efforts to facilitate visitation.

Item 14. Preserving connections

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of the foster care cases, reviewers determined that DFS made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections. However, in 16 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that children's connections to extended biological family and/or to their heritage and faith had not been preserved in foster care.

Item 15. Relative placement

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. However, there were concerns related to this issue in 18 percent of the applicable cases. A primary problem identified was that searches for relatives were cursory rather than thorough in nature. This is a key finding because the availability of relative placements impact upon child well-being as well as on permanency.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 73 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS made diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationship of children in foster care. However, concerns related to this issue were identified in 27 percent of applicable cases.

III. WELL-BEING

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved for 40 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

A general CFSR finding was that DFS is not effective in meeting the assessment and service needs of parents, children, and foster parents. Forty-four percent of the cases reviewed were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this indicator. In addition, stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that the agency is not adequately addressing the treatment or placement needs of older children entering foster care as CHINS petitions or through juvenile justice. Information from the case reviews and stakeholders also indicate that DFS is not consistent in involving parents or children in the case planning process. Finally, in many of the cases reviewed, it was determined that the frequency and quality of DFS contacts with children and parents was not sufficient to ensure children's safety or well-being or promote attainment of case goals.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 56 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents had been, or were being, adequately addressed by DFS. However, in 44 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFS was not adequately addressing the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents. This finding is not consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS provides the services necessary for accomplishing the goals and tasks for children and families as indicated in their case plans, which are developed individually to meet the specific needs of each child and family.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 62 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS appropriately involved parents or children in the case planning process. However, in 38 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that parents and/or children had not been appropriately involved in the case planning process. This finding is not consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy outlines steps for a caseworker to create a written plan that the client and the caseworker agree to pursue together. Caseworkers are trained to develop case plans in conjunction with clients.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. This is one of the most significant concerns identified in the CFSR. In 54 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of children's safety and to promote attainment of case goals. However, in 46 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to monitor children's safety or to promote attainment of case goals. This finding is consistent with information reported in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires caseworkers to make a face-to-face visit with all children in their caseloads at least once a month. In cases in which a child may be placed outside their home county/State, telephone contacts are to be made with all parties once a month. A study reported in the Statewide assessment found that only 65 percent of youth in YFS in-home services cases are seen by their caseworker once a month and only 50 percent of children in the in-home CPS cases are seen once a month. For out-of-home cases, the study found that only 7 percent of children in YFS cases are visited by their caseworker once a month and only 14 percent of children in CPS out-of-home cases have monthly contact with caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment notes that although these numbers may not reflect the contacts made by family assistance workers, they are of concern to the State.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 56 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents was sufficient to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and promote attainment of case goals. However, in 44 percent of cases, concerns were identified with respect to the frequency and/or the quality of worker visits with parents. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires that caseworkers establish face-to-face contact with parents at least once a month. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that large caseloads and vast distances between communities are barriers to caseworkers making these contacts in accordance with State policy.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 82.1 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome. This is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity. The general finding of the CFSR process was that the agency was not consistent in assessing children's educational needs and providing appropriate services to meet those needs.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child.

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because for 82 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFS was effective in meeting children's educational needs. However, in 18 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the educational needs of children were not effectively and appropriately addressed.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 63.8 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

CFSR findings indicate that DFS is not consistently effective in meeting children's physical or mental health needs. A key concern identified with respect to physical health services was the lack of health screenings for children in foster care. Reviewers and stakeholders also expressed concern about the scarcity of mental health and substance abuse services for children, and the fact that children are not receiving needed mental health assessments.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS adequately addressed children's health needs. However, reviewers determined that these needs were not adequately met in 28 percent of applicable cases. According to the Statewide Assessment, a Health Check (EPSDT) is required for every child in placement over 30 days. The Statewide Assessment also notes, however, that the State is aware that not all children entering foster care are receiving health screenings according to policy and is taking steps to resolve this problem.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 74 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS adequately addressed children's mental health needs. However, in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that mental health needs were not adequately addressed. Stakeholders and the Statewide Assessment noted that there is a scarcity of mental health services in the State, particularly for children.

KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Status of Statewide Information System – Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with this factor.

Item 24. The State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

Item 24 was rated as a Strength because the State's information system can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Status of Case Review System – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

Item 25 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although there is evidence that every child has a written case plan, CFSR findings indicate that caseworkers are not consistent in involving parents as partners in developing the case plan.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

This item was rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that DFS provides a periodic administrative review on the status of each child at least once every 6 months.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

Item 27 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of concerns that the required 12-month permanency hearings are not consistently being held in a timely manner across the State.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR found that (1) there are areas within the State where the courts and the agency appear to be reluctant to pursue termination of parental rights (TPR), (2) there are delays at the county level in the process of filing for TPR, and (3) there are court delays in processing contested terminations.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

Item 29 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although there is policy in place, the agency does not provide a consistent process for notifying foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers regarding reviews and hearings.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Status of Quality Assurance System- Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the factor of Quality Assurance System.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

Item 30 was rated as a Strength because the State has the required standards in place to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

Item 31 was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because a statewide quality assurance system has not yet been fully implemented. According to the Statewide Assessment, a recently developed policy to mandate regular case reviews, reviews of management reports, quality control reviews at the State level, and corrective action plans has not yet been approved. Thus, while there are plans for a functioning and comprehensive quality assurance system for the future, currently there is not a fully functioning system in place.

VII. TRAINING

Status of Training-Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

Item 32 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the State lacks an effective, comprehensive, Department-wide staff development and training program. This is a key finding because staff training and skills-development are related to the quality and effectiveness of casework practice and is supportive of the seven safety and well-being outcomes.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

Item 33 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because DFS does not have an ongoing training program or requirements for staff.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because the State provides quality training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Status of Service Array-Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of service array.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

Item 35 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because both the CFSR process and the Statewide Assessment determined that the array of services is not equal across the State and services are particularly limited in rural areas. According to the Statewide Assessment, because of the small population and vast distances between communities, services may be quite a distance from the residence of the family or child.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

Item 36 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there is an unevenness of services throughout the State due to economy of scale issues, insufficiency of services to meet identified needs, and at times the absence of services. Stakeholders noted gaps in the statewide availability of a variety of services, particularly mental health, psychiatric providers for children who will accept Medicaid, and community-based treatment for youth. The availability of appropriate placement resources was also a key concern identified by stakeholders. This is a key finding because the lack of services reduces the ability of the community to safely maintain children in their own homes and to strengthen and preserve their families. According to the Statewide Assessment, because of the small population and vast distances between communities in the state of Wyoming, services may be quite a distance from the residence of the child and family. Information collected as part of the Statewide Assessment process indicates that many communities lack sufficient options and resources to adequately serve children and families. In some communities, the number of service providers is limited, resulting in clients being placed on lengthy waiting lists or having to travel great distances to access services. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, there is also a lack of appropriate placement options for children which results in children being placed in out-of-home care settings based on available placement beds rather than in response to children's needs. This practice often results in children being unnecessarily removed from their communities or being placed in environments that are more restrictive than necessary to meet their needs.

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

Item 37 was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR findings indicate that DFS does not tailor services to meet the unique needs of children and families.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Status of Agency Responsiveness To The Community- Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

Item 38 was assigned a rating of Strength because the general finding of the CFSR review is that DFS is highly responsive to the community. According to the Statewide Assessment, the Wyoming Department of Family Services has a strong history of coordinating and collaborating with external community resources. Stakeholders commenting on this issue generally expressed praise for the agency's responsiveness to the community and mentioned that the agency has shown considerable improvements in this area.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered.

Item 39 was rated as a Strength because DFS worked with the community representatives in preparing the State's Child and Family Services Plan and in preparing other plans and reports.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Item 40 was rated as a Strength because the State coordinates its services or benefits with other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention- Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Findings relevant to the specific items assessed for this outcome are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

Item 41 was assigned a rating of Strength because the State has implemented standards that address safety, health, sanitation and child well being. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that facilities are held to high standards and that the licensing and certification process is thorough.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

Item 42 was assigned a rating of Strength because the standards are applied equally to children placed in foster care and relative foster care placements receiving title IV-E funds.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

Item 43 was rated as a Strength because the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

Item 44 was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because there is no structured statewide process to ensure aggressive

recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Item 45 was assigned a rating of Strength because the State has implemented several initiatives to enhance cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Introduction

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Wyoming. The Wyoming CFSR was conducted the week of July 8, 2002. The Final Report is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Wyoming Department of Family Services (DFS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases at 3 sites throughout the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, service providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

The key characteristics of the 50 cases reviewed are the following:

- 20 cases were reviewed in Laramie County, 16 in Natrona County, and 14 in Sweetwater County.
- All 50 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review.
- 31 of the cases were “foster care cases” (cases in which children were in the care and custody of the State child welfare agency and in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review), and 19 were “in-home services cases” (cases in which families received services from the child welfare agency while children remained in their homes).
- In 36 of the cases, all children in the family were Caucasian; in 6 cases, all children in the family were two or more races; in 2 cases, all children in the family were African American; in 2 cases, all children in the family were Native American; in 2 cases, all children in the family were Hispanic; and in two cases, reviewers did not identify the race/ethnicity of the children.
- Of the 50 cases reviewed, the **primary** reason for the opening of a child welfare agency case was the following:
 - Child in juvenile justice system – 14 cases (28%)
 - Physical abuse – 10 cases (20%)
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 10 cases (20%)
 - Child’s behavior – 9 cases (18%)
 - Sexual abuse – 2 cases (4%)
 - Mental/physical health of parent – 2 cases (4%)
 - Abandonment – 1 case (2%)
 - Other – 2 cases (4%)
- Among **all** reasons identified for children coming to the attention of the child welfare agency, the most frequently noted were the following:
 - Child’s behavior – 22 cases (44%)
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 21 cases (42%)
 - Child in juvenile justice system – 20 cases (40%)

- Physical abuse – 18 cases (36%)
 - Substance abuse by parents – 9 cases (18%)
 - Emotional maltreatment – 9 cases (18%)
 - Mental/physical health of parent – 7 cases (14%)
 - Substance abuse by child – 7 cases (14%)
 - Mental/physical health of child – 6 cases (12%)
- Children in 35 percent of the cases in which the primary reason for contact with the agency was the child’s behavior or the child’s involvement in the juvenile justice system also were identified victims in child maltreatment reports.
 - For 10 (32%) of the 31 foster care cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and remained in foster care during the entire period under review.

The first section of the report presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State’s performance in achieving specific outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting key findings, a discussion of the State’s status with regard to the outcome, and a presentation and discussion of each item assessed. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency’s ability to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.